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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5589

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3308

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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3838

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001076

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; DRL; G/TIP

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TAGS: KTIP PGOV SCUL SOCI OSCE TX

SUBJECT: OSCE SPONSORED TIP SEMINAR FOR TURKMEN OFFICIALS

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A recent OSCE-organized seminar on combating trafficking in persons (TIP), held in Ashgabat, brought together Turkmen officials and international experts for an overview of the TIP problem. Topics covered included the definition of TIP and the global scope of the problem, the role of a national TIP rapporteur, the importance of international law enforcement cooperation, and anti-TIP civil society activity in Ukraine. Success at obtaining Turkmen Government approval for the meeting suggests that the government has evolved away from its denial that the problem exists in Turkmenistan. Sessions lacked any Turkmenistan focus and government officials offered little in the way of information about Turkmenistan's efforts in this area. Still, the seminar can serve as a base from which hopefully future seminars and other anti-TIP activities can move the Turkmen Government closer to implementing concrete measures to proactively address TIP in the country. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On August 25, the OSCE Center in Ashgabat sponsored a one-day seminar, "Prevention of and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings," for 30 Turkmen Government officials, with support from the Foreign Ministry and the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR). Attendees included representatives from the parliament, Ministry of Justice, law enforcement agencies, the National Institute of State and Law, and various agencies dealing with social welfare, health and education. Opening remarks were made by OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Eva Biaudet, and IDHR Director, Shirin Akhmedova. In addition to highlighting the global scope of human trafficking, Biaudet noted that Turkmenistan needed to add TIP sanctions to its Criminal Code as a means of completing the legislative framework begun with its Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons. She also spoke in favor of all OSCE states creating a national TIP rapporteur position as some European countries have done, as well as emphasizing the importance of implementation of the OSCE Action Plan. Akhmedova noted the Turkmen Government's efforts in combating TIP, including acceding to international conventions and reaching bilateral legal agreements with a number countries. She mentioned that work is ongoing on the criminalization of TIP and identified the Office of the General Procurator as Turkmenistan's national TIP coordinator, with responsibility for preparation

an annual TIP report to the Cabinet of Ministers.

¶3. (C) The seminar consisted of a series of presentations by foreign speakers about various aspects of TIP. A United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Crime Prevention expert from its Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant smuggling Unit gave basic presentations about the definition of TIP and the scale of TIP worldwide. Following the definition presentation, Ms. Akhmedova asked the sole question of the morning -- since the next legislative step for Turkmenistan was criminalization of TIP, were there any examples about this step from other former Soviet republics. The Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings next spoke about her office and its usefulness in monitoring anti-TIP activity and holding responsible officials accountable. Her discussion was broad ranging. She pointed out the conundrum faced by countries that collect a lot of TIP data, and as a result, appear to have a worse TIP record than other countries that do not collect and publish TIP data. At the same time, she noted that knowledge is the basis for effective government anti-TIP action, stressing that "trafficking is easily overlooked if you don't want to see it." The rapporteur described Holland's approach to combating TIP, with its national action plan, task force for implementation of the plan, parliamentary debates on the issue, and the office of the rapporteur. She emphasized that the task of the parliament was to monitor and critically assess implementation of anti-TIP measures.

¶4. (C) The Senior Anti-Trafficking Adviser at OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) discussed

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OSCE members' commitments based on the OSCE TIP Action Plan of 2003. Key principles of the plan are: its focus on prevention, prosecution and protection aspects of the problem; the need to criminalize TIP and apply appropriate sanctions; and restraint from prosecuting TIP victims for immigration and other criminal activity related to their TIP circumstances. A representative from EUROPOL stressed the importance of cross-border cooperation and information sharing in order to combat TIP. He explained how such cooperation works in practice with a detailed account of the investigation of a TIP network that brought young victims from Romania to the UK to engage in petty crime. The head of a Ukrainian anti-TIP NGO coalition made an effective presentation about the work of NGOs in her country, presenting an excellent description of how civil society can supplement government efforts in a former Soviet country, giving concrete, practical examples of activities such as referral networks, awareness campaigns and publications, hot lines, and crisis centers.

¶5. (C) During the concluding feedback/comment session, the Turkmen attendees had little to say. The ODIHR advisor's request for information about Turkmenistan's anti-TIP law, number of TIP prosecutions and existence of national action plan went unanswered. Akhmedova asked for more details about the Dutch national TIP report -- how is it done, how often and who pays for it. One social welfare official asked about whether illegal migrants claim to be TIP victims to avoid prosecution for migration violations and how to distinguish such cases.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The OSCE Center in Ashgabat deserves credit for organizing this seminar as part of its broader effort to engage with the Turkmen Government on the TIP issue. A lot of information was presented, and in particular the presentation by the Ukrainian NGO leader seemed to engage the attendees' interest. That said, whether intentionally or not, there was very little indication that the presenters took into account the current status of anti-TIP efforts in Turkmenistan, or that they focused on actions that might be relevant for Turkmenistan to move to a higher level of anti-TIP implementation. For example, presenters referred to the importance of developing agreements with NGOs on victim

assistance, seemingly unaware that the Turkmen government keeps civil society tightly under wraps. Listening to hours of simultaneous translation - only the Ukrainian presenter spoke in Russian - the attendees often appeared bored and disengaged. Although the seminar failed to deliver a message of clear next steps to the Turkmen, the seminar did put the TIP issue squarely on the agenda for further international engagement, and the Turkmen Government's willingness to allow the event to take place indicates that the government no longer denies that the issue is relevant to Turkmenistan. Future anti-TIP efforts will need to focus on concrete steps that the government can take to meet its anti-TIP commitments. END COMMENT.

MILES